

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9255
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMCONSUL LAHORE
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 15868

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT IN
SUBJECT: KASHMIR POLITICS: CONFRONTATION, COMPROMISE AND THEN
BACK TO SQUARE ONE

REF: NEW DELHI 14265

SUMMARY: THE STRAINED RELATIONS BETWEEN SHIKH ABDULLAH'S
NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR (J&K) CONGRESS
UNIT APPROACHED A POINT OF CONFRONTATION IN EARLY OCTOBER
OVER THE QUESTION OF CIVIC ELECTION IN THE VALE. A ROUND
OF "SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY" BETWEEN SRINAGAR AND DELHI RESULTED
IN A COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE SHEIKH AND THE CENTER WHICH
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APPEARED TO SATISFY BOTH SIDES: THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE
WOULD BE ALLOWED TO WIN THE BULK OF THE SEATS IN THE

MUNICIPAL COUNCILS IN THE VALE, WHILE FOUR STATE CONGRESS LEADERS WERE TO BE ADMITTED INTO ABDULLAH'S SENIOR CABINET. BUT A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY, AND THE DEAL COLLAPSED. THE SITUATION IN THE STATE HAS APPARENTLY RETURNED TO SQUARE ONE, WITH BOTH THE CABINET EXPANSION AND THE CIVIC ELECTIONS POSTPONED INDEFINITELY. A NEW ROUND OF ACIMONY MAY ARISE BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES, BUT WE STRONGLY DOUBT WHETHER PRIME MINISTER GANDHI WILL ALLOW ANY RENEWED CONGRESS-NATIONAL CONFERENCE HOSTILITY TO REACH THE POINT OF ENDANGERING THE FEBRUARY 1975 KASHMIR ACCORD. END SUMMARY.

1. THE SPARRING AND SHADOW-BOXING BETWEEN SHEIKH ABDULLAH AND THE CONGRESS HAS CONTINUED APACE DURING THE WEEKS SINCE OUR LAST UPDATE ON KASHMIR POLITICS (REFTEL). THE MOST RECENT BONE OF CONTENTION CENTERED AROUND THE TIMING AND PROCEDURES FOR THE HOLDING OF CIVIC ELECTIONS IN THE VALLEY OF KASHMIR. SHEIKH ABDULLAH HAD LONG INSISTED THAT THE ELECTIONS (ALREADY TWICE-POSTPONED) BE HELD IN EARLY NOVEMBER, WHILE THE LOCAL CONGRESS LEADERS, PRESUMABLY ACTIONG ON BEHALF OF THE CENTER, DEMANDED THAT THE POLL BE DELAYED INDEFINITELY. THE SHEIKH FAVORED ELECTIONS NOW ON THE RATIONALE THAT HIS NATIONAL CONFERENCE WOULD EASILY DEFEAT ANY CANDIDATES THE CONGRESS MIGHT FIELD, AND THEREBY CAPTURE THE BULK OF THE SEATS ON THE SRINAGAR AND THREE OTHER TOWN COUNCILS. THIS WOULD CONSOLIDATE HIS POSITION IN THE VALE AND DEMONSTRATE THE STRENGTH OF HIS POPULARITY TO MRS. GANDHI. WHEN THE LOCAL CONGRESS UNIT IN EARLY OCTOBER REJECTED ABDULLAH'S "PEACE OFFER" TO HOLD THE ELECTIONS ON A "NON-PARTY" BASIS, THE SHEIKH OPENLY VOWED THAT IF THE CONGRESS WANTED TO CONTEST THE POLL ON A PARTY BASIS THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE WAS PREPARED TO FIELD ITS OWN SLATE OF CANDIDATES AND FIGHT IT OUT. HE EVEN HELD OUT THE SPECTRE OF FORMING AN ELECTORAL ALLIANCE WITH MAULVI FAROOQ'S AWAMI ACTION COMMITTEE.

2. A CONGRESS-NATIONAL CONFERENCE CONFRONTATION APPEARED IMMINENT, AND A KIND OF "SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY" WAS UNDER-CONFIDENTIAL
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TAKEN TO POUR OIL ON THE ONCE-AGAIN TROUBLED WATERS. CONGRESS PRESIDENT BAROOAH SPENT A FIVE-DAY "HOLIDAY" IN SRINAGAR IN MID-OCTOBER, FOLLOWING WHICH ABDULLAH TRAVELLED TO DELHI FOR THREE DAYS OF TLAKS WITH BAROOAH, MRS. GANDHI AND OTHER SENIOR CONGRESS LEADERS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT WHEN ABDULLAH ARRIVED IN THE CAPITAL, HE WAS PRESENTED A "PACKAGE DEAL" ON A TAKE-IT-OR-LEAVE-IT BASIS: CONGRESS WOULD AGREE TO THE HOLDING OF THE KASHMIR CIVIC ELECTIONS ON SCHEDULE AND THROUGH "ELECTORAL ADJUSTMENTS" THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE WOULD BE ALLOWED TO CAPTURE CONTROL OF

THE COUNCILS (I.E, THE CONGRESS WOULD CONTEST ONLY A FEW SEATS, THUS LEAVING THE FIELD OPEN TFOR THE SHEIKH'S CANDIDATES). ABDULLAH'S SON-IN-LAW, G.M. SHAH, TOLD AN EMBOFF IN SRINAGAR AT THIS POINT THAT THE CONGRESS WOULD "PROBABLY" DEMAND ONLY FOUR OF FIVE OF THE 28 SEATS ON THE SRINAGAR MUNICIPAL COUNCIL. IN RETURN FOR THIS CONCESSION, THE CENTRAL LEADERSHIP INSISTED THAT ABDULLAH REDRESS THE LONG-STANDING GRIEVANCE OF THE J&K CONGRESS THAT THEY HAD BEEN EXCLUDED FROM THE "INNER CIRCLE" OF SENIOR MINISTERS AROUND THE SHEIKH. SPECIFICALLY, THE CENTER INSISTED THAT ABDULLAH EXPAND HIS SENIOR CABINET TO INCLUDE FOUR J&K CONGRESSMEN AS FULL-FLEDGED MINISTERS. (NOTE: HERETOFORE, THE SENIOR CABINET CONSISTED ONLY OF ABDULLAH, HIS DEPUTY M. A. BEG, AND TWO TECHNOCRATS LOYAL TO THE SHEIKH. CONGRESSMEN HELD ONLY MINISTER OF STATE POSITIONS.) THE SHEIKH, APPARENTLY REALIZING THAT HIS FREEDOM OF ACTION WAS ULTIMATELY LIMITED BY THE CONTER, AGREED TO THIS COMPROMISE. UPON HIS RETURN TO SRINAGAR ON OCTOBER 21, HE ANNOUNCED THAT HE WAS EXPANDING HIS SENIOR CABINET TO INCLUDE FOUR CONGRESSMEN (STATE ASSEMBLY SPEAKER A.G. GONI, J&K PCC GENERAL SECRETARY ALI MOHAMMED NAIK, AND TWO CURRENT MINISTERS OF STATE, RANGIL SINGH AND MANGAT RAM). IN ADDITION, THREE NATIONAL CONFERENCE MINISTERS OF STATE (INCLUDING HIS SON-IN-ULAW, G.M. SHAH) WERE BEING ELEVATED TO FULL CABINET RANK. THE SENIOR CABINET THUS WOULD CONSIST OF FOUR COGRESSMEN,

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FIVE NATIONAL CONFERENCE MEMBERS, AND TWO NON-POLITICAL
TECHNOCRATS.

3. THE COMPROMISE REACHED IN DELHI APPEARED TO HAVE
RESOLVED THE THREAT OF "CONFRONTATION" FOR THE MOMENT,
AND PREPARATIONS GOT UNDER WAY FOR CBNTTESTING THE CIVIC
ELECTIONS. THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ANNOUNCED THAT IT
WAS CONTESTING ALL THE SEATS. BUT SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE A
SNAG DEVELOPED THAT CAST INTO DOUBT THE ENTIRE"PACKAGE
DEAL." CONGRESS REFRAINED FROM FIELDING ANY CONDIDATES
FOR THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL SEATS; THE CLOSING DATE FOR
FILING NOMINATION PAPERS WAS EXTENDED ON OCTOBER 24.
THE FOLLOWING DAY, JUST MINUTED BEFORE THE NEW CABINET
MINISTERS WERE DUE TO BE SWORN IN, ABDULLAH SUDDENLY
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ANNOUNCED THAT THE SWEARING-IN CEREMONY WAS POSTPONED
AND THAT THE CIVIC ALECTIONS AS WELL WERE BEING PUT OFF.
HE SAID THAT THIS ACVTION WAS NECESSARY BECAUSE OF THE
"PERSISTENCE" OF "SOME DIFFICULTIES" BETWEEN THE

CONGRESS AND THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OVER THE HOLDING OF CIVIC
ELECTIONS.THE NEXT DAY MRS. GANDHI WELCOMED THE
SHEIKH'S DECISION SINCE IT WOULD GIVE THE TWO SIDES
MORE TIME TMEWORK OUT THEIR DIFFERENCES. AT A PUBLIC
RALLY OUTSIDE SRINAGAR ON OCTOBER 28, ABDULLAH RULED
OUT ANY COBINET EXPANSION FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE
AND REGRETTEED THAT THE AGREEMENT HE AHD REACHED
WITH THE "CONCERNED RESITNSIBLE LEADERSHIP" HAD NOT BEEN
ACCEPTED BY THE LOCAL CONGRESS LEADERS.

4. COMMENT: THERE IS SOME SPECULATION THAT LOOKING
AT THE AGREEMENT MORE CLOSELY, THEJ&K CONGRESSMEN CAME
TO BELIEVE THAT THEY HAD BEEN HOODWINKED BY THE SHEIKH.
FOR ONE THING, THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE PLANNED TO CONTEST
ALL SEATS IN THE MUNICIPAL COUNCILS, THUS GIVING LITTLE
HOPE TO THE CONGRESS THAT THEY COULD WIN THEIR AGREED-
UPON SHARE OF THE SEATS. FOR ANOTHER, THERE ARE SOME

RUMORS TO THE EFFECT THAT THE FOUR CONGRESSMEN TO BE INDUCTED INTO THE SENIOR CABINET WERE DISSATISFIED WITH THE PORTFOLIOS THEY HAD BEEN ALLOTTED. MOST OF ALL, HOWEVER, THERE IS THE WIDELY-KNOWN RESENTMENT OF J&K CONGRESS AT THE FACT THAT THE SHEIKH REFUSES TO DEAL WITH THEM. WHENEVER HE HAS A PROBLEM HE GOES DIRECTLY TO THE PRIME MINISTER OR BAROOAH FOR A RESOLUTION. PERHAPS THE REAL REASON BEHIND THE COLLAPSE OF THE DELHI COMPROMISE WAS THE UNHAPPINESS OF THE LOCAL CONGRESSMEN THAT THEY HAD NOT BEEN ADEQUATELY CONSULTED DURING THE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN ABDULLAH AND THE CENTAL LEADERSHIP.

5. WHATEVER THE EXPLANATION, THE SITUATION IN KASHMIR APPEARS TO HAVE RETURNED TO SQUARE ONE. THE SHEIKH IS YROBAUXLY UNHAPPY OVER THE INDEFINITE POSTPONEMENT OF THE CIVIC ELECTIONS, WHICH HE VIEWEC AS A MEANS OF CONSOLIDATING HIS POWER AND POPULARITY IN THE VALE. (WITH WINTER FAST APPROACHING AND THE STATE GOVERNMENT SCHEDULED TO MOVE TO JAMMU IN A WEEK FOR THE WINTER
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MONTHS, THESE CANNOT PROBABLY BE HELD UNTIL NEXT SPRING AT THE EARLIEST.) AND THE LOIKL CONGRESS UNIT'S DESPLEASURE AT BEING EXCLUDED FROM THE SENIOR CABINET CONTINUES AS BEFORE. IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT HOW LONG THIS IMPASSE WILL GO ON AND WHETHER IT WILL RESULT IN A RENEUED"CONFRONTATION" BETWEEN THE CONGRESS AND NATIONAL CONFERENCE. JUDGING FROM THE PAST HISTORY OF REALTIONS BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES SINCE THE FEBRUARY 1975 KASHMIR SCCORD, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT ACRIMONY WILL CONTINUE FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, BUT THAT MRS. GANDHI WILL BE EXTREMELY CAREFUL TO ENSURE THAT THIS BAD BLOOD DOES NOT REACH THE POINT OF ACTUALLY ENDANGERING THE KASHMIR ACCORD ITSELF.
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